

"Register, intersubjectivity and non-prototypicality of personal pronouns"

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Abstract

In this paper, I will argue that the traditional ascription of non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns to a specific genre and/or register, merits to be revised. Instead, I will propose an analysis in terms of intersubjective effect as a more suitable explanation of the distribution of these phenomena. Non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns have been described for a long time in the literature, e.g. generic and speaker-referring you (Grimm 1866) or hearer-oriented we (Brown & Levinson 1978. Often, these uses are deemed to be confined to – or typical for – a certain register or genre. The hearer-oriented uses of we, for instance, are considered typical for power-relationships such as teacher-student, doctor-patient (Haverkate, 1984:87; Iglesias Recuero, 2001:266), whereas generic and speaker-referring you have been considered a feature of oral language, rather than written language (Tarenskeen 2010, Vila 1987, Hidalgo Navarro 1996). Based on an analysis of three Spanish mult...

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Register, intersubjectivity and non-prototypicality of personal pronouns

In this paper, I will argue that the traditional ascription of non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns to a specific genre and/or register, needs to be revised. Instead, I will propose an analysis in terms of intersubjective effect as a more suitable explanation of the distribution of these phenomena.

Non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns have been described for a long time in the literature, e.g. generic and speaker-referring *you* (Grimm 1866), hearer-oriented *we* (Brown & Levinson 1978). Often, these uses are deemed to be confined to – or typical for – a certain register or genre. The hearer-oriented uses of *we*, for instance, are associated to power-relationships such as teacher-student, doctor-patient (Haverkate, 1984:87; Iglesias Recuero, 2001:266), whereas generic and speaker-referring *you* have been considered a feature of oral language, rather than written language (Vila 1987, Hidalgo Navarro 1996, Tarenskeen 2010).

Based on an analysis of three Spanish multi-person interaction corpora, namely informal conversation (COREC-UAM), TV-debates (COREC-UAM) and parliamentary debates (Congreso 2001, 2005), as well as examples taken from novels and written texts, I will argue for a more layered analysis of the genre- or register-relatedness of non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns, also in other Romance and Germanic languages.

Thus, the strictly complementary genre-distribution between a generic 2nd person singular and *uno* 'one' argued for in Spanish literature, does not seem to hold, e.g. in utterances combining both forms such as (1) call for a different type of analysis. Similarly, hearer-oriented 1st person plural forms are also found in context where no power-relationship can be defined, e.g. among partners (see o.a. Borthen 2010, author in press) (2).

- (1) *Allá hay camaroneras, que va uno por el río Uchire,*
There there-are nets-for-shrimps, that goes-3sg one by the river Uchire,
tú ves las camaroneras. (econ022e)
you see-2sg the nets-for-shrimps.
'Over there, there are nets for shrimp fishing, when one goes by Uchire river, you see the nets for shrimp fishing.
- (2) *Good for you, honey, but listen, we have to do the dishes.* (Grand Magazine)

I will show that these uses stand apart in view of their intersubjective effect, however (Benveniste 1966, Lyons 1982, Traugott 2003). Their distribution is rather in line with overall differences (beyond non-prototypical uses of personal pronouns) as to the presence of intersubjectivity according to register (as attested in Scheibman 2002, 2007, De Cock 2010). The concept of intersubjectivity allows for a more comprehensive analysis of these phenomena than a mere register-based analysis.

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